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Negotiating for Data Base Sharing

PERHAPS WE CAN BEST begin by providing a description of MULS (Minnesota Union List of Serials) in order to give an idea of its structure and to explain the interest of other organizations in using the data base for their projects. We will then attempt to describe the four types of negotiations in which it has become involved, and conclude with a few observations.

Background Information

MULS is a listing of serial titles held in nearly every library in Minnesota and in many in North Dakota. The project was begun in the summer of 1971, when the participants of the statewide network, Minnesota Interlibrary Telecommunications Exchange (MINITEX), voted to use a portion of their resource-sharing appropriations to produce a serials list. At that early point in the network's development, it was obvious that physical access was dependent upon bibliographic access and that the existing serial bibliographic tools were not adequate. Considering that three-fourths of the MINITEX requests were for journal citations, this was a significant problem.

Since August 1971, two hardbound editions and several fiche editions from the computer printout have been produced. A third bound edition of nine or ten volumes is scheduled for the summer of 1977. All of the editions are completely cumulative; there have been no supplements.

Beginning with the 1973/74 biennium, MULS has been supported by public funds as part of the MINITEX/Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board budget; additional state and federal LSCA funds have come from the Office of Public Libraries and Interlibrary Cooperation for public library participation. This use of public funds plays a significant role in the decision to share the MULS data base.

The data base presently contains 84,622 parent records and 52,013 cross-references and added entries. All types of serial records are included: periodicals, newspapers, annuals, document serials, monographs in series — in short, anything which is meant to continue publication indefinitely. Unnumbered series are excluded if the holding library does not use series-added entries in their catalog.

A wide variety of libraries have holdings included in MULS; this fact is reflected in the broad spectrum of titles which have been entered. The MULS data base has in its significant holdings not only those titles found in typical academic collections, but also those found in public and special libraries, including medical, agricultural, legal and theological titles. State, local and foreign document titles have been contributed to a large extent by Minnesota state agency libraries and by the university; newspapers have come chiefly from historical societies and from university collections.

The bibliographic information contained in MULS, although not as complete as that found on many catalog cards, is a good deal more complete than that traditionally contained in a union list of serials. It was felt that the extra coding and verification would be justified by the improvement in bibliographic control. A rather lengthy verification procedure is followed for each item; this is explained in the introduction to each edition and, in addition, the CONSER file is now being used as a primary verification source.

The holdings portion of the data base is actually significantly larger than the bibliographic portion. This results from the numerous holdings statements (sometimes more than 100) attached to each bibliographic record. The holdings statements are considered to be under the control of and, in a sense, "owned by" each respective library. The bibliographic portion is controlled by MULS/MINITEX.

The following elements, if present for the title in question, may be contained in the MULS record:

1. *Bibliographic/fixed field*: record type, date of entry into data base, conference publication indicator, modified record indicator, language of publication, country of publication, beginning date of serial, ending date of serial, publication status designator, type of periodical indicator, government publication designator, catalog source code,

physical media designator, type of material code and nature of contents code.

2. *Bibliographic/variable length fields*: Library of Congress card number, ISSN, language (041), main entry — personal name, main entry — corporate name, main entry — conference/meeting, title, abbreviated journal title, edition, imprint, general note, contents note (brief), note on indexing/abstracting coverage, note on volumes/numbers, note on supplements, note on indexes, added entries and cross references. In addition, there is a "location of holdings" tag which provides internal control for retrieval of records for individual locations.
3. *Holdings portion*: NUC symbol for library, a locally assigned 3-letter mnemonic, a subdivision of the primary location, the actual holdings down to issue level if desired and always including date, call number and notes pertaining to that particular holding.

Careful editing and rigorous problem-solving are done throughout the entry process and all printouts are proofread. Upon initial entry into the data base, each library is given a printout of their data as entered for corrections, additions and deletions. At this point, the update procedures begin and each library is strongly urged to participate. Update information is processed continually and, in fact, there has not been one working day in the five and one-half year history of the project during which update information has not been processed.

Perhaps the most important point to be made about the data base is that from the very beginning the decision was made that the then-new MARC format for serials would basically be used for MULS. There are some local variations, mostly in the form of omissions of some fields, but other fields were actually augmented. Nevertheless, by using MARC tagging and subfielding, output tapes in MARC communications format can be produced. Since 1971 some changes and additions have been made to the original format which have brought it into closer alignment with MARC-Serials (MARC-S). As the staff moves to on-line control of the data base, it is expected that any remaining differences can effectively be eliminated.

Principle (CONSER)

Although several inquiries had been made, the first seriously considered request for non-Minnesota use of the MULS data was made by the Council on Library Resources (CLR), the administrative agency for the CONSER Project. Most libraries are aware of the project, especially since its coverage in the January 1977 issue of *American Libraries*; the need for such an undertaking was identified and the mechanism established. OCLC is currently housing the file on its system;

selected libraries are participating in the project on-line, and CLR is the CONSER manager.

At start-up time, however, it seemed most desirable to have a data base to begin with. MARC-S record service had not then been operational for long, and the file was still small. After some investigation, CLR approached MINITEX to ask that they consider contributing the MULS file to CONSER, since it appeared to be the largest existing data base which was basically in the MARC format and which contained rather complete bibliographic records.

Data base sharing was a new concept at that time and admittedly there were some problems. Looking back, most of them now seem of little consequence. First, there was confusion about who should negotiate for use of the data base. MULS is a program of the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board (MHECB) which contracts with the university for its administrative services. There is a MINITEX Advisory Committee, and individual libraries contributed their records. The university held the copyright. After covering all the possibilities, the university library administration in conjunction with the MINITEX/MULS staff (with MHECB concurrence) became the negotiating agent.

The second problem was even more complex in that it concerned a matter of personal feeling. OCLC had earlier approached MULS directly to explore the possibility of procuring the data base for its system. After discussion, a proposed fee was established. OCLC never responded, however, and the inquiry came to naught. Now, as part of the CONSER arrangement, OCLC would be getting the data base. Nonetheless, the opportunity to participate in what promised to be a landmark project left little choice: it was decided that the data base would be given.

The final problem was that of real costs to MULS. It was quite obvious that for some time the in-house system would have to be maintained along with the on-line input to the CONSER records. The first priority was to continue supporting the MINITEX resource-sharing system through the MULS bibliographic access. CLR in an eminently reasonable manner compensated MULS for its CONSER updating activity by providing one terminal and subsidizing the maintenance and line charges on two terminals.

In the summer of 1975 a magnetic tape of the MULS file was delivered to CLR and the MULS staff continued to input new records and to augment their tape-loaded records.

It might be said that the CONSER agreement was one concluded for the sake of principle. The cooperative creation, augmentation and authentication of a file of MARC-S records is one that any library-oriented person would support. MULS had been produced using public funds and it was only fitting to contribute it to a national program. The CONSER

negotiations were mostly verbal and the final agreement was merely in the form of letters exchanged between the university library administration and CLR. Upon reflection, it is doubtful that anyone would disagree with this decision. Making a decision for the sake of a principle is a good idea.

Partnership (North Dakota and Wisconsin)

The second major use of the MULS file outside Minnesota was for the creation of a union list of serials for the state of North Dakota. Minnesota and North Dakota have a reciprocity agreement which allows students to attend schools in the neighboring state at in-state tuition rates and includes an understanding about sharing various resources. As a part of the agreement which covered sharing library resources and bibliographic services, a North Dakota Union List of Serials (NDULS) was created by adding North Dakota holdings and unique records to the MULS data base. As a precursor to the interstate agreement, North Dakota State University (part of the Tri-College University consortia) had already participated in MINITEX, and their holdings were included in MULS.

Critical to the agreement was a resource-sharing clause that included the development of a serials data base. All the serial literature is available for use by both states; thus, North Dakota data became an integral part of the MULS file. When the physical items are not accessible, however, a totally different approach must be taken.

In the North Dakota/Minnesota library contract, MHECB through its MINITEX network agreed to:

1. prepare a union list of North Dakota serials (NDULS) and deliver it in camera-ready copy to be published and distributed by the North Dakota State Library Commission at its own expense (the North Dakota records were then to be added to MULS);
2. maintain the NDULS data base during this and consequent agreements and (at mutually agreeable times and costs) supply updated camera-ready copy or microfiche;
3. provide at mutually agreeable times sublistings of titles within given specifications;
4. supply a copy of the NDULS on tape to the North Dakota State Library Commission (note that the bibliographic portion was to be controlled by MULS — the holdings by NDULS); and
5. enter into negotiations for computer programs to support a possible independent NDULS system. It was further agreed that NDULS would be completed and delivered to the North Dakota State Library Commission within thirteen months of the date of the contract.

The remainder of the agreement dealt with resource-sharing and finally affixed an amount to be paid to MHECB.

The MULS/North Dakota relationship was essentially a partnership because of the reciprocity agreement. This proved very workable and most satisfactory, for both sides were cooperating to produce a tool which would enhance their library service. The payment to Minnesota was based on the inequities of resources and services. This partnership agreement, like the one based on principle, seems to be sound and agreeable.

The Wisconsin Little Magazine Project (an agreement to input records for a large and significant collection of little magazines held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison) is basically the same as the agreement with North Dakota, for Minnesota also has a reciprocity agreement with Wisconsin. While the funding was different in that it came from an NEH grant, the circumstances were similar and those records became an integral part of the MULS data base.

Vendor (Montana)

The third type of negotiation to share the MULS data base has undoubtedly been the least satisfactory. This was the agreement to produce the Union List of Montana Serials (ULMS). Since Minnesota and Montana do not share resources, this became a service-bureau type of negotiation. Minnesota could efficiently produce a union list of serials for Montana by adding their holdings to the existing bibliographic records and creating new records with holdings for any unique items. There were also obvious advantages for Minnesota. It is very expensive to pay an adequate staff to maintain a union list of serials. MULS has been successful partly because it has been a continuous program with all participants regularly submitting update data. The Montana agreement could help to level the work flow and thus permit retention of some staff who otherwise could not be justified.

In many ways, however, minds were still in the past, and perhaps the Minnesota negotiators were not careful enough during the discussion period and with the written agreement. Minnesota wanted to share its information for the same reason that the CONSER Project was begun, i.e., to avoid continued replication of the same bibliographic records. The details varied, however; the agreement was to produce a product for a customer and no partnership was involved: MINITEX had become a vendor! A subtle change takes place when a customer puts money down for a product. The sense of sharing and cooperation is somehow lost and the buyer begins to think in terms of comparing vendors' bids and to expect a sales staff. MINITEX obviously had no sales staff and was not skilled in bid preparation or competition for jobs. Previously, responses had only been made to requests for the MULS data base in cooperative or partnership modes. While MINITEX reluctantly agreed

to send a staff person to Montana to explain MULS and the procedures for handling Montana input, there was no forewarning of the competitive situation which developed. The two-part session included private presentations by Blackwell/North America and MULS with a final summary by both representatives. While Lois Upham was simply providing an explanation, the Blackwell representative was trying to make a sale.

In spite of a higher cost Montana chose MULS, probably for the following reasons: (1) MULS's proven success and ability, (2) its willingness to make extensive efforts in clarifying bibliographic entries before returning them to the contributing library, and (3) because any unique Montana records would become part of the CONSER file. The asking price was not attractive to many Montana libraries; in fact, it was bluntly questioned why MULS was asking "so much." The project was nevertheless less than financially satisfactory to MULS for several reasons:

1. The number of titles actually submitted exceeded by 50 percent the figures upon which the original estimate was based.
2. New lists continued to arrive after the proposed cutoff date — even though the cutoff had already been extended one month.
3. Many of the submissions were almost illegible and required a great deal of time to decipher.
4. Many entries were not submitted in AACR/LC form and thus required a greater degree of professional judgment to determine correct entry for search and input.
5. Not all the problems which were returned to the contributors for clarification were answered satisfactorily.

Moreover, due to the above factors, processing took much longer than was originally estimated. Not only did this mean more staff hours, but a new fiscal year and increased salaries created havoc with the budget.

The Montana union list agreement contained almost exactly the same provisions regarding creation of the serials list as did the one with North Dakota — except that the North Dakota agreement was part of a larger sharing arrangement. An agreement that was satisfactory between partners was not sufficient for a vendor/buyer relationship. Different relationships led to different expectations. Lacking specific numbers and dates and/or penalty statements, there was little recourse, so the data — extra, late, poor quality, etc. — were handled by a small staff which had not expected these problems. In addition, there was some confusion about verbal promises made during the meetings.

Thousands of hours of work went into the project, and Minnesota has learned a valuable lesson. Our experience suggests that future agreements such as this should be modified. First, all conversations, meetings and discussions should be carefully recorded in detailed minutes, on tape,

or both. Secondly, the details of the agreement (the number of records to be submitted, the form in which they are to be submitted and submission deadlines) should be carefully set down. If changes occur, renegotiation should take place or a penalty clause of some sort could be written into the text. For example, this could take the form: "It is expected that 25,000 records will be submitted; however, if this number exceeds 26,000, the amount of \$x will be assessed for each record over 26,000."

"Family" (MINITEX Participants)

The final type of negotiation is between MULS and an individual or group of MINITEX participants who want to receive subset listings of the entire data base. The capacity to produce such lists for any configuration of libraries has been available from the beginning of the project. It is a reasonable service and many lists have been produced, but there are some difficulties.

These lists are produced at cost and generally coincide with another production. The program required to estimate costs accurately is frequently more expensive than the actual run itself. Therefore, if a group insists on exact estimates and definite production schedules, the cost is obviously greater.

Observations

In retrospect, MINITEX/MULS has been involved in four types of data base negotiations: (1) negotiations based on principle, (2) negotiations as a partnership, (3) negotiations as a vendor, and (4) negotiations as a member of the "family." Each type has its individual characteristics, working environment and rewards that determine the relationship between the parties.

When libraries negotiate for services or products, it is critical that they understand their options and weigh all the possibilities carefully in order to make the best choice. While it is a cliché, most misunderstandings could have been avoided if the objectives, responsibilities and expectations had been clearly defined at the beginning.

As a subset of American society, the library community has two basic models. The capitalist, profit-making tradition is well established. We are all conditioned by vigorous salesmanship, slick marketing, keen competition, a full range of products and services, and the attitude of *caveat emptor*. We also have a long and noble tradition of cooperative efforts producing credible results, frequently with limited finances. This is the energy that helped to settle the West, man volunteer fire departments and reduce pain and suffering through organized charitable activity. The models are not mutually exclusive; they exist side by side.

The rapid development of cooperatives and networks which started in the early 1960s is evidence that librarians are increasingly looking at cooperative ways to share resources and services. Uncertain funding, constrained budgets, the information explosion and ever-increasing user demands exert pressure on the library community to look to the commercial sector or cooperative arrangements as a panacea. Both are expensive. Purchased expertise is expensive and a product may be inappropriate for the desired application. Cooperative decision-making and activity is time-consuming and requires patience. The products are sometimes fragmented and amateurish. Perhaps librarians are sometimes too quick to abdicate their independence when they have the ability to solve their own problems. They possess the professional expertise that is needed. It is not always necessary to relinquish everything to commercial enterprises. Perhaps a blend of the two could exploit the best qualities of each.

While MINITEX/MULS relies heavily on the commercial sector to assist in some of the computer and printing processes, we can positively attest that negotiations with other librarians are most rewarding when they involve sharing and cooperation. It is our professional tradition and appears to be mutually beneficial to all.